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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000149

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [IS](#) [PHUM](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: POPE SPEAKS OUT AGAIN; HOLY SEE RESPONDING TO  
HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

REF: VATICAN 134, 142, 143, 145 146

VATICAN 00000149 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary

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[11.](#) (C) Benedict XVI emphasized the rights and plights of  
Lebanese and Israelis July 23 while addressing the current  
crisis in the Middle East. Though the Holy See has expressed to  
us privately its support for a "robust" multi-national force,  
the pope stopped short of saying so Sunday. The Holy See is  
focused on the issue, with FM-equivalent Lajolo fully engaged.  
Our contacts and Vatican-based media report that  
Vatican-affiliated charitable organizations are key partners in  
relief efforts connected to the crisis, particularly in Lebanon.  
End Summary.

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Benedict Speaks Again

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[12.](#) (C) Benedict XVI repeated aspects of the Holy See's take  
on the current situation in Lebanon July 23, emphasizing the  
right of the Lebanese people to a free and sovereign country,  
the right of Israelis to live in peace, and the right of the  
Palestinian people to a free and sovereign homeland. Though the  
Holy See has expressed to us privately its support for a  
"robust" multi-national force (reftels), Benedict did not  
explicitly say so Sunday, simply calling for an immediate  
ceasefire, the provision of humanitarian aid and for the start  
of negotiations supported by the international community.

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Victims on Both Sides

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[13.](#) (U) The pope expressed his concern Sunday for the innocent  
civilian victims on both sides of the current conflict,

mentioning "those of Galilee, obliged to live in shelters, as well as the great multitude of Lebanese, who once more, see their country destroyed, and have to leave everything behind to try to save themselves in another place."

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Vatican-Affiliated Relief Efforts  
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¶4. (U) The pope urged relief organizations to do their utmost to deliver aid to the populations most affected by the violence.

Our contacts (and Vatican-based media) report that Vatican-affiliated charitable organizations are at the forefront of relief efforts, particularly in Lebanon. Caritas-Lebanon has been supplying food, medicines, soap, milk and baby products to some 25,000 people. The organization is also trucking drinking water and food to different parts of the country. Local Caritas officials report difficulties in communication between teams located throughout Lebanon due to damage to roads and bridges, and telecommunications infrastructure.

¶5. (U) Caritas Lebanon has mobilized a fleet of mobile health clinics around the country, which are visiting schools and other shelters, bringing aid to children, the old and the sick. Religious orders in Lebanon have opened their schools, monasteries and other facilities to provide shelter to refugees, but are hampered by dwindling supplies and sky-rocketing prices for fuel and other essentials. Caritas has opened an appeal for some \$1.5 million to fund its relief effort, as well as an additional \$175,000 to help the Caritas Migrants Center, which assists vulnerable foreign workers and refugees in the country. In some cases, the Migrants Center is helping with repatriating migrants through Syria, in coordination with Caritas Sri Lanka.

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Comment

VATICAN 00000149 002.2 OF 002

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¶6. (C) The Vatican's public comments on the crisis have been much more balanced since the initial statement by Cardinal Secretary of State Sodano July 14. The Holy See MFA equivalent

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is focused on the situation, with FM Lajolo fully engaged and the Vatican's Middle East experts scrapping their plans to return home for summer vacation to provide support.

¶7. (SBU) The Holy See's geopolitical concern for the situation in Lebanon and Israel is backed up by its humanitarian relief efforts on the ground. Our contacts emphasize that the various national Caritas organizations, along with local Catholic religious orders and parishes, are well-established and trusted by the civilian populations. They continue to be key partners in international relief efforts.

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